

# DOE

# NEWS

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## **DOE FINES OPERATOR OF IDAHO NATIONAL ENGINEERING AND ENVIRONMENTAL LAB FOR SAFETY VIOLATIONS**

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has fined the Lockheed Martin Idaho Technologies Co. (LMITCO) of Idaho Falls, ID, \$25,000 for violations of nuclear safety regulations under the Price Anderson Amendments Act. LMITCO operates the Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory (INEEL) for the DOE.

The violations occurred in July 1996 when five workers in the INEEL Waste Calcining Facility received unplanned internal radiation exposures. The facility was formerly used to process high level radioactive waste generated from the reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel. It is currently being decontaminated and decommissioned. A worker cutting into a pipe caused airborne radiological contamination to be spread throughout the room. The workers, unaware of the airborne contamination and unprotected by respirators, remained in the contaminated environment for approximately 40 minutes. The exposures were detected when two workers chose to leave the area and their contamination was detected during monitoring at the exit. At that point, the room was immediately evacuated.

Internal radiation doses were measurable but did not exceed regulatory limits. However, had the two workers not chosen to leave the room when they did, significantly greater levels of exposure could have resulted as workers continued to work unaware of the contaminated atmosphere. The department expressed its strong concern that exposures were not limited by the company's established work planning processes, a basic requirement of nuclear safety, but by the fortuitous exit of the two workers from the area.

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Investigations by the DOE Office of Enforcement and Investigation and LMITCO identified a number of failures to comply with LMITCO's basic radiological and work planning processes. Adherence to these requirements, identified by LMITCO as necessary to protect workers, could have mitigated or possibly prevented the unplanned exposures. These include:

- \* The use of air monitoring devices to detect airborne contamination;
- \* The conduct of radiation surveys during the pipe cutting;
- \* Work stoppage while the required surveys were conducted; and
- \* Workers wearing respiratory protection.

In its enforcement letter to LMITCO, DOE recognized that the company initiated an immediate and thorough investigation of the incident that led to a complete understanding of the underlying causes of the exposures and an effective plan for corrective actions. While the DOE considered partial mitigation of the fine based on this investigation, a similar incident in January 1997 indicated that the corrective actions had yet to be sufficiently implemented. DOE has deferred any enforcement action on the latest event until it reviews corrective actions being implemented by LMITCO.

The enforcement action against LMITCO marks the eighth -- including five civil penalties -- taken by the Office of Environment, Safety and Health since the Price Anderson Enforcement Program began operating in early 1996. DOE's Enforcement Program focuses on the most "safety significant" issues and tailors the severity of the enforcement action to the seriousness of the violation. Penalties can be partially mitigated in cases where contractors act quickly to identify and correct safety problems.

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